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Department of Theology

USES OF SCRIPTURE IN THE WRITINGS OF ATHANASIUS OF ALEXANDRIA

a dissertation

by

JAMES DAVID ERNEST

submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements

for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

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Uses of Scripture in the Writings of Athanasius of Alexandria

James David Ernest

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Athanasius of Alexandria, the fourth-century bishop famous for his role in the Arian controversy, used Scripture variously and voluminously in his writings. He did not wish to present himself as an exegete, but his uses of Scripture across the various genres in which he wrote reveal an coherence of approach. He reads the Bible as a unified account that explains salvation in terms of the incarnation of the uncreated Word of God and models it through the positive and negative examples of various biblical characters. This dissertation undertakes a minute examination of his rhetorical and exegetical practices, primarily in the Greek corpus of his writings.

In his early apologetic writings, he follows traditional Christian literary models more closely than in his later writings. He also shows significant originality, however. In particular, although these works are not yet explicitly anti-Arian, he diverges from traditional text collections in order to emphasize anti-Arian prooftexts. In his later, explicitly anti-Arian writings he seems to set forth exegetical rules, but his actual practice hinges mostly on the discernment and application of *paradigmata*, key biblical images that make it possible to subordinate particular texts to the biblical metanarrative of salvation. In his historical-polemical writings, Athanasius responds to the charges of his enemies. Here again biblical language forms the core of his rhetoric: biblical *exempla* constantly undergird his moral argumentation. Usually the implications of his correlations of contemporary world and biblical world are obvious, but in some of his writings against Constantius he relies on biblically literate readers to detect an ironic undercurrent in his prose. Correlation of the present with biblical narratives functions positively in the pastoral writings, which give us Athanasius's most uncalculating and spontaneous applications of Scripture. In the *Life of Antony*, the great monk's speeches exhort readers to obey biblical commands and imitate biblical models, while the narrator indicates that Antony himself modeled in a consummate way the life of victory over demonic forces.

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I offer my results, however flawed they may remain, to the One whose Word Athanasius served and whose Spirit has sustained me in this toil, in the hope that this study may contribute in some small way to our understanding and experience of Scripture as wellspring of life in the church of our day.

James Ernest

The Feast of Maria Theotokos, January 1, 2001

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The Study of Athanasius and of His Use of Scripture

Long centuries of Christian tradition regarded Athanasius of Alexandria with pure reverence as the sainted bishop and theologian who almost single-handedly turned back the Arian threat of the fourth century—a hagiographical attitude which the ripening of critical scholarship undermined.¹ In the middle of the 19th century, Möhler's biography still praised Athanasius as a saint beloved by all who knew him well. For Newman, Athanasius was a hero, the very model of a bishop, writer, and theologian. Harnack credited Athanasius with returning the church of his day from political distractions to a focus on the preaching of salvation through Christ. Archibald Robertson (editor of the Athanasius translations in the *NPNF*) believed that even those who did not credit Athanasius with single-handedly saving the Truth from its enemies nevertheless admired and respected him—even Gibbon.² But Gibbon

¹What follows here is only a very concise and selective overview of the secondary literature on Athanasius in general. F. L. Cross, *The Study of St. Athanasius* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1945), assessed the history of scholarship up to the mid-twentieth century. A bibliography of the secondary literature published up to around 1992 occupies pp. 155–344 of Christel Butterweck's *Athanasius von Alexandrien: Bibliographie* (Opladen: Westdeutscher Verlag, 1995); a final, unnumbered page of this book lists thirteen additional items published by 1995. As Butterweck points out (paraphrasing what she says on p. 13): Athanasius's contacts with the earliest monks as well as with numerous important church and secular leaders, and as a "theologian and church politician" (here Butterweck is alluding to the title of an article by Schneemelcher) left such a mark on church history and the history of dogma that a bibliography on his life and works would almost have to incorporate the whole bibliography on the fourth century. Thus even this massive (but nevertheless very useful, esp. because of the *Schlagwortregister*) bibliography is by design only partial. A new bibliography is expected to appear soon in *Sacris Erudiri*: Johan Leemans, "Thirteen Years of Research on Athanasius (1985–1998): A Survey and a Bibliography."

²Gibbon, who in general is highly critical of the early Christian leaders, does in fact speak highly of "the intrepid Athanasius" (*The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* [ed. J. B. Bury; New York: Heritage, 1946], 601). For example, he offers this summary: "Amidst the storms of persecution, the archbishop of Alexandria was patient of labour, jealous of fame, careless of safety; and, although his mind was tainted by the contagion of fanaticism, Athanasius displayed a superiority of

already checked the very positive assessment of Athanasius in his text with more critical comments in his footnotes, a foreshadowing of unmutated criticism to come.³ Toward the end of the 19th century, Otto Seeck charged that Athanasius had forged documents in his historical and apologetic writings. In the first decade of the twentieth century, Eduard Schwartz portrayed him as ruthless and domineering, a view supported in 1924 by H. I. Bell's publication of a papyrus apparently validating charges that Athanasius used brutal violence against Meletian monks. Gibbon's "intrepid Athanasius" becomes "an utterly intransigent character."⁴ More recently Timothy Barnes portrayed Athanasius as a scheming, lying, and violent tyrant. His comparison of Athanasius to a modern gangster in *Constantine and Eusebius* is widely quoted, and his more recent *Athanasius and Constantius* highlights the bishop's skill as a liar.⁵ Where such views caught on, interest in Athanasius's writings as theology waned; they were seen rather as propaganda supporting a quest for political power. Accordingly a leading historian of rhetoric describes him as "a skilled but unscrupulous dialectician whose invectives are not pleasant reading."⁶

character and abilities, which would have qualified him, far better than the degenerate sons of Constantine, for the government of a great monarchy. His learning was much less profound and extensive than that of Eusebius of Caesarea, and his rude eloquence could not be compared with the polished oratory of Gregory or Basil; but, whenever the primate of Egypt was called upon to justify his sentiments or his conduct, his unpremeditated style, either of speaking or writing, was clear, forcible, and persuasive." See Leslie W. Barnard, "Edward Gibbon on Athanasius," pp. 361-70 in *Arianism: Historical and Theological Reassessments* (ed. R. C. Gregg; Cambridge, Mass.: The Philadelphia Patristic Foundation, 1985).

³Barnes, "Edward Gibbon on Athanasius."

⁴This is the first mention of Athanasius in A. H. M. Jones, *The Later Roman Empire* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1986), 1:88. This study was originally published in 1964.

⁵Barnes says that Athanasius "organized an ecclesiastical mafia" in order to bolster his power over against the emperor by destabilizing the city of Alexandria and that "like a modern gangster, he evoked widespread mistrust, proclaimed total innocence—and usually succeeded in evading conviction on specific charges" (230). —Barnes's two books contribute immeasurably to Athanasian studies, not because of what they say about Athanasius's character or theology but in the areas of chronology and political relations between the emperors and the church.

⁶George Kennedy, *A New History of Classical Rhetoric* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), 264.

The dissonance between the hagiographical and the demonizing interpretations has generated a more balanced view. The character of Athanasius was at least partially rehabilitated in 1988, when Duane Arnold argued that Bell had misconstrued the evidence of the papyri.⁷ Others, including Frances Young, Leslie Barnard, Christopher Stead, and Martin Tetz, had already been focusing again on Athanasius's positive contributions while acknowledging the evidence for certain flaws.⁸ The books and articles of Charles Kannengiesser focus attention on the political and especially the local Alexandrian social circumstances in which Athanasius operated, but whereas the critical approaches of Schwartz and others sometimes obviate serious consideration of the Athanasian texts as theology, Kannengiesser's references to social setting enable a theological reading of a particular kind. He concludes that unlike Arius, whom he sees as a third-century Origenian interested in working out certain problems in speculative theology, Athanasius represents not an intellectual elite but the "silent majority" of Alexandrian Christians who hoped for salvation in Christ and had no use for notions that might undercut the biblical basis of that hope. That is, Athanasius's concerns as a theologian were not speculative but ecclesial and pastoral. They came out of a church that could no longer engage in the relatively pure spiritual reflection that is possible only in sectarian isolation but had been drawn into the maelstrom of imperial politics. Kannengiesser's description of Arius is probably destined to remain controversial, since

⁷His book, *The Early Episcopal Career of Athanasius of Alexandria* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1991), includes as a section of its first chapter a review of nineteenth- and twentieth-century views of Athanasius (11–23). This material was also published separately as "Athanasian Historiography: A Century of Revision," *Coptic Church Review* 12 (1991):3–14. My remarks here draw especially on this chapter of Arnold and on some of Kannengiesser's articles, especially "St. Athanasius of Alexandria Rediscovered: His Political and Pastoral Achievement," *Coptic Church Review* 9 (1988):68–74.

⁸See the bibliography. Even more positive appreciations have been forthcoming from writers who want to appeal to him in support of current concerns, e.g., Orthodoxy or ecumenism (Florovsky, Thomas Torrance, and others).

evidence for Arius's actual teaching is scarce,⁹ but the exposition of a central *pastoral* concern in Athanasius's anti-Arian dogmatic writings is well established and crucial to understanding those works.

The most recent major studies of Athanasius, with their diverse interests and methodologies, contribute in different ways to a balanced portrayal. David Brakke's work, which focuses especially on the role of Athanasius in fostering asceticism, demonstrates the interplay of social and theological factors. His readings not only of the familiar writings available in Greek but also of previously neglected ascetical writings available only in Coptic or Syriac show how Athanasius cultivated various groups in Egyptian society in order to construct a catholic Christian practice centered around the authority of the bishop of Alexandria but accessible to all, Hellenized urbanites as well as desert monastics.¹⁰ Annick Martin's comprehensive study of the evidence for Egyptian Christianity in the fourth century significantly enhances our ability to locate the Athanasian texts, and the names and events to which they refer, in concrete historical settings.¹¹ Khaled Anatolios's study shows that whatever the social and historical dynamics at work in Athanasius's writings, their intellectual coherence demonstrates a definite and sustained theological motivation: the bishop's response to the challenge of Arianism hinges on a clear articulation of the absolute distinction between Creator and created and the

⁹The literature regarding Arius is large. Major treatments include Robert C. Gregg, ed., *Arianism: Historical and Theological Reassessments* (Patristic Monograph Series, 11; Cambridge, Mass.: The Philadelphia Patristic Foundation, 1985); and Rowan Williams, *Arius: Heresy and Tradition* (London: Dartman, Longman, and Todd, 1987).

¹⁰The bulk of David Brakke's dissertation, "St. Athanasius and Ascetic Christians in Egypt" (Yale University, 1992) was revised, supplemented with English translations of some of the ascetical writings, and published as *Athanasius and the Politics of Asceticism* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1995), which has been reprinted, unchanged except for title, as *Athanasius and Asceticism* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998). Two chapters of Brakke's dissertation were published separately: "The Greek and Syriac Versions of the *Life of Antony*," *Muséon* 107 (1994): 29-53; and "The Authenticity of the Ascetic Athanasiana," *Orientalia* 63 (1994): 17-56. For his other articles, see the bibliography.

¹¹Annick Martin, *Athanase d'Alexandrie et l'église d'Egypte au IV^e siècle (328-373)* (Rome: Ecole française de Rome, 1996).

unambiguous identification of the Word as uncreated.¹² Existing scholarly literature therefore provides substantial resources for understanding the Athanasian texts in the context not only of theology and church history but also of social and political history.

Studies of Athanasius's Use of Scripture

Regarding the more specific subject of the present study, namely, the uses of Scripture in the writings of Athanasius, the literature is not abundant, and it consists mostly of articles rather than books.¹³ The author of a recent handbook to patristic exegesis explains: "Athanasius only holds marginal interest for us, because he himself took little interest in exegesis."¹⁴ This verdict is correct insofar as "exegesis" implies deliberate exposition of continuous biblical text. The *Clavis patrum graecorum* does include a category of exegetical writings under the name of Athanasius, but these seem to be mostly spurious. The case of the large *Commentary on the Psalms* in PG 27 will be discussed below. That volume of Migne also includes numerous exegetical fragments that are attributed to Athanasius in the catenae; how much of that material has any connection at all with him is an open question. In addition, the *Synopsis sacrae scripturae*, listed in the CPG not among the *exegetica* but with

¹²Khaled Anatolios, *Athanasius: The Coherence of His Thought* (London: Routledge, 1998).

¹³This brief survey discusses only a selection of monographs and articles. Other important discussions are referenced in the particular chapters below to which they are relevant. A full bibliography would include the items included under the heading *Schriftauslegung* in Butterweck, *Athanasius von Alexandrien: Bibliographie*, 379–80. Many of the items listed there focus on particular biblical texts or motifs; numerous others have to do with exegetical or theological questions connected specifically to the Arian controversy; and some deal with the relation of Scripture and tradition. As Charles Kannengiesser notes: "Mit dem Vorhaben, über Athanasius von Alexandrien als Exeget zu schreiben, erspart man sich wenigstens die Mühe einer komplizierten bibliographischen Übersicht" ("Athanasius von Alexandrien als Exeget," pp. 226–43 in *Stimuli: Festschrift für Ernst Dassmann* [edited by Georg Schöllgen and Clemens Scholten; Münster: Aschendorff, 1996], at p. 336).

¹⁴Manlio Simonetti, *Biblical Interpretation in the Early Church: An Historical Introduction to Patristic Exegesis* (trans. John A. Hughes; ed. Anders Bergquist, Markus Bockmuehl, and William Horbury; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1994), 77. Simonetti then comments briefly on the *Letter to Marcellinus*. This treatment is of course fully justified given the purpose and size of that book.

the *spuria*, is sometimes still attributed to Athanasius, but it is almost certainly a later work.¹⁵ Some of these works might after careful evaluation be credibly attributed to Athanasius, so a comprehensive study of Athanasius as *exegete* would have to assess them. In addition, some of the Greek homilies attributed to Athanasius, for example the *Homily on Matthew 11:27* (generally cited as *In illud Omnia*), may be authentic. But they are based on texts that caused difficulties for Nicene theology, so they share with the dogmatic writings of Athanasius this feature: their exegesis is not like that of a commentary that approaches the text of Scripture to learn whatever it turns out to offer by applying a particular methodology or set of interpretive techniques; it is more a matter of defending against an exegetically supported doctrinal assault by proposing an alternative exegesis, using a methodology that will produce the required result. In this sense Athanasius does offer exegesis. The bulk of the present study, however, describes uses of Scripture that would fall outside most definitions of "exegesis."

A useful starting point for discussing recent literature is an article published in 1959 by T. E. Pollard.¹⁶ At that time it was customary to categorize early Christian writers as allegorists (Alexandrians) and literalists (Antiochenes). Despite the Alexandrian epicenter of their conflict, Pollard

¹⁵In the "Animadversiones in vitam et scripta S. Athanasii" included in the front matter of PG 26, the editor notes that Tillemont thought that the *πυκρία τῶν θείων Γραφῶν* that Constans requested from Athanasius (*Apol. Const.* 4) were the *Synopsis sacrae scripturae* of the Athanasian corpus; but he argues against Tillemont both on the basis of the meaning of *πυκρία* and also on the basis of the discussion of the canon in the *Synopsis*. (See PG 26: clxxvi-clxxviii.) Actually the Old Testament and New Testament canons of the *Synopsis* and *Festal Letter* 39 agree; but there are differences in the discussion of additional books. (See Appendix B for the relevant portions of the *Synopsis* and Table 5-13 for the canon of *Ep. fest.* 39.) The first five books listed by Athanasius as recommended reading for catechumens are also listed as such by the *Synopsis*; and their names are repeated in the list of the OT antilegomena. But whereas Athanasius also lists the *Didache* and the *Shepherd* as being read to catechumens, the *Synopsis* does not. As the Migne editor notes, the *Synopsis* does not mention the *Shepherd of Hermas* at all, and it does list several works that Athanasius never mentions. More seriously, it seems to me, the *Synopsis* lists the *Didache* among the NT antilegomena along with several works that come in for stern disapproval. On this basis alone it is difficult to imagine that Athanasius could have written the *Synopsis*. —Szymusiak's note on *Apol. Const.* 4 raises the question but leaves it unanswered: "S'agirait-il de la 'Synopsis,' P.G. 28, 283-438, rangée traditionnellement au nombre des écrits douteux, ou d'une simple copie de la Bible?"

¹⁶"The Exegesis of Scripture and the Arian Controversy," *BJRL* 41 (1959), 414-29.

classes both Athanasius and his Arian opponents as literalists, as over against "the allegorical method of interpreting Scripture, at least as the basis for the formulation of doctrine." The Arians were "extreme literalists," while Athanasius is said to show here and there traces of the influence of the Alexandrian allegorical tradition. In the main, however, he followed "clearly defined exegetical principles." These are (1) the sufficiency of Scripture; (2) the scope of Scripture; (3) the custom with Scripture (*ἔθος τῆς γραφῆς*); (4) the sense (*διάνοια*) of Scripture; (5) the style of Scripture; and (6) the context of Scripture. In summary, Pollard states that "by laying down these principles of exegesis and by using them with care in his criticism of the selective exegesis of the Arians," Athanasius was able to show that their theology was not biblical. Pollard calls this set of principles Athanasius's "method." His list is quite disparate, however. The "scope" of Scripture is indeed an important criterion in Athanasius's hermeneutics, but it is not really an element of an exegetical method.¹⁷ Nor is "sufficiency." Athanasius, who insists on the priority of biblical teaching over speculative reasoning, does state that Scripture provides sufficient support for his doctrinal positions; but this claim does not constitute an exegetical principle or technique. Pollard's attempt to find in Athanasius a statement regarding the relative authority of Scripture and tradition as sources for doctrine reads into Athanasius a response to a dispute that arose centuries later. The "sense" and the "custom" of Scripture are not equivalent terms, as Pollard says they are; "style" is perhaps closer to the latter. "Context" is an over-simplified way of referring to several related elements which in fact represent Athanasius's only explicit claim to be using a "method"; these are hardly discussed at all.¹⁸ But if Pollard's article does not deliver the "clearly defined exegetical principles" that it promises, it nevertheless points out important questions, texts, and possible elements of an exegetical method.

¹⁷At any rate, Pollard's explanation of what the term "scope of Scripture" means is less than fully satisfactory. See pp. 154-57 below for a discussion of this term.

¹⁸For Athanasian exegetical "rules" and vocabulary, see below pp. 149-61 and 182-87.

A more promising point of departure is Jaroslav Pelikan's 1962 study, *The Light of the*

World.¹⁹ Unfortunately, this study has not always received the attention it deserves: to theologians and historians of doctrine, the use of light imagery *per se* is not the most critical feature of Athanasius's thought; it is one image out of many.²⁰ On the other hand, historians of biblical exegesis can see at once that Pelikan's book is not designed as a study in that field. And yet it follows Athanasius's own concerns more closely than any study aimed at extracting "exegetical principles" from his work and identifies a hermeneutical approach that pervades all of his writings, dogmatic-polemical, historical-polemical, and pastoral. In Pelikan's words:

This theological method, which Athanasius advocated in his discussion of the problem of biblical *paradeigmata* and which he himself practiced in his constructive and polemical writings, I shall call in one phrase "the collation of biblical images."²¹

By this Pelikan means Athanasius's practice of taking up major biblical images *seriatim* and deriving theological meaning from them, none of them being understood in isolation, but all contributing to a coherent whole. This he does not only in theology proper but also in ethics.²²

The most important single work explicitly devoted to Athanasian Scripture interpretation is the 1968 dissertation of Hermann Josef Sieben on Athanasius's use of the Psalms.²³ One might wonder

¹⁹*The Light of the World: A Basic Image in Early Christian Thought* (New York: Harper, 1962).

²⁰This despite the fact that according to Pelikan (p. 57) the NT hapax ἀπαύροσα (from Heb 1:3) occurs 90 times in Athanasius.

²¹*Ibid.*, 29.

²²*Ibid.*, 95-110.

²³"Studien zur Psalterbenutzung des Athanasius von Alexandrien im Rahmen seiner Schriftauffassung und Schriftlesung" (dissertation zur Erlangung der theologischen Doktorwürde am Institut Catholique zu Paris, 1968). Apart from Allen Clayton's dissertation on Athanasius's interpretation of Prov 8 (see below p. 16 n. 42), Sieben's dissertation is the only full monograph on Athanasian biblical interpretation that I am aware of. In addition, Sieben refers to a manuscript in Russian that he was unable to obtain: I. Varlamov, "Die Heilige Schrift in der Theologie des Heiligen Athanasius des Großen" (Leningrad, 1960, Manuskript an der geistlichen Akademie).

to what extent Sieben's work is undermined by the subsequent development of a consensus that the *Athanasian Commentary on the Psalms* is inauthentic;²⁴ the answer is, not much, because of the dissertation's five parts, only the third (titled "Prophetische Psalterlesung") is thoroughly dependent on the *Commentary*. And yet, since it was never published and is difficult to access, it has not received the attention it deserves. Sieben states that the biggest problem with older treatments of Athanasius's view of Scripture was that either they took into account only his dogmatic writings, or else they pigeonholed his interpretation as allegorical or literal, or Alexandrian or Antiochene. Sieben points out that what is needed is to see the various genres in which Athanasius wrote about the Bible in organic relationship to each other. Simply taking up the existing writings in their various genres—dogmatic, apologetic, exegetical, homiletical—would be an unsatisfactory procedure in Sieben's view, because the dogmatic writings would tip the scales and make the typological use of the OT in other writings appear secondary. It is better, he says, to focus not on the writings that happen to have been transmitted but on the historical figure of Athanasius, because the dogmatic writings were occasional responses to the Arian controversy; they take pride of place in the transmitted literary corpus but occupied less of his life as a bishop. So Sieben sets out in his various chapters to describe the *Sitz im Leben* of each species of Athanasian Scripture use. He selects the Psalms as the book of the Bible to follow in the writings of Athanasius because there was a commentary only for the Psalms (as was thought). The point of

²⁴I.e., the *Expositiones in Psalmos*, CPG 2140. When Sieben wrote the dissertation, the commentary was available only in Migne, concerning which M. Geerard's terse comment is: "Editio est nulli usui" (*Clavis patrum graecorum*, vol. 2, *Ab Athanasio ad Chrysostomum* [Turnout: Brepols, 1974], 28). Sieben knew that M. J. Rondeau had found the Athanasian Psalms commentary to be dependent upon that of Eusebius ("Une nouvelle preuve de l'influence littéraire d'Eusèbe de Césarée sur Athanase: L'interprétation des Psaumes," *RSR* 56 [1968]: 385–434) but he argued that even so Athanasius's own categories and methods for typological interpretation could be found in this work. The publication ten years later of Giovanni Maria Vian's *Testi inediti dal Commento ai Salmi di Atanasio* (*Studia ephemeridis "Augustinianum"* 14; Rome: Institutum Patristicum "Augustinianum," 1978) stirred new interest, including that of Gilles Dorival, whose article "Athanase ou Pseudo-Athanase?" (*Rivista di storia e letteratura religiosa* 16 [1980]: 80–89) made a case for its inauthenticity. G. C. Stead, who in 1982 was still prepared to consider the commentary probably authentic ("The Scriptures and the Soul of Christ in Athanasius," *VC* 36 [1982]: 233–50) later concluded that Dorival was right ("St. Athanasius on the Psalms," *VC* 39 [1985]: 65–78).

departure for his study, he says, is the role that Scripture plays not so much in Athanasius's theology as in his life and spiritual-religious world.²⁵ Accordingly, Sieben begins with the use of the Bible in the *Life of Antony* (part 1 of the dissertation), then moves on to the *Letter to Marcellinus on the Interpretation of the Psalms* (part 2), the *Commentary on the Psalms* (part 3), the dogmatic writings (part 4), and finally the *Festal Letters* (part 5).

The *Life of Antony*, although written later than the *Orations Against the Arians* and many of the *Festal Letters*, comes at the beginning of Sieben's dissertation, because he judges that it represents Athanasius's "grundlegende, originäre Schriftauffassung."²⁶ the way he relates to them spontaneously out of his own spirituality: namely, as a guidebook to virtue or ascesis. As the first and more general basis of this judgment, Sieben quotes Werner Jäger to the effect that whereas moderns tend to see ancient Christian authors in terms of the history of doctrine, the Fathers themselves would have seen such a perspective only as a point of departure toward the question of one's orientation to life.²⁷ He adds a second, more particular basis:

Because Athanasius is known too exclusively as the champion of dogma and in fact the use of Scripture that has been transmitted to us in his works is mainly of a dogmatic nature, it appears to us to be appropriate at the very outset to correct or fill out this one-sided image of Athanasius and his relationship to Scripture. In other words, we wish to make a distinction between use of Scripture in dogmatic argumentation, which was forced upon Athanasius by historical circumstances, and the spontaneous involvement with Holy Scripture that grew out of the center of his piety and his worldview.²⁸

This perspective appears frequently in the writings of Sieben's *Doktorvater*, Charles Kannengieser; and it accords well with recent studies by Badger, Brakke, and others of Athanasius's teaching on ascesis and

²⁵This summary closely follows Sieben, "Psalterbenutzung," 6–7.

²⁶*Ibid.*, 11.

²⁷*Ibid.*, 11; quoting W. Jäger, "Paideia Christi," in *Humanistische Reden und Vorträge* (2d ed.; Berlin: De Gruyter, 1960), 26.

²⁸Sieben, "Psalterbenutzung," 12, my translation.

ordinary Egyptian Christians how to pray, keep the feasts, and ward off the demons? Maybe he was a pugilist at heart. Many modern readers of Athanasius probably would agree with Hans von

Campenhausen's assessment:

It is obvious that he was a well-trained theologian. But it is difficult to feel that theological work as such gave him any pleasure, let alone that he had any desire to teach others. For him theology was simply a weapon.³²

But in my opinion Sieben is almost completely right, and Campenhausen was half wrong: if one defines "theological work" as the kind of argumentation that appears in the anti-Arian dogmatic writings, perhaps it did not give him much pleasure. At least the exegetical component of this work shows nothing like the reverent but eager expectancy with which Origen approaches the biblical text, bringing no agenda other than a desire to learn from it, ruminating lovingly over its phrases and words, and delighting in fresh discoveries. Nevertheless, teaching others how to live and believe as Christians was exactly what Athanasius wanted most to do, and by some accounts he was very good at it.³³ His battle was against the devil, and the theology that was his weaponry is that of the *Letter to Marcellinus*, the *Life of Antony*, and to a lesser extent the *Festal Letters*. From his own point of view, he was carrying out the same task in the anti-Arian writings, where he finds the same Enemy who hinders ascetic practice at work also in the teachings of his enemies. The dogmatic-polemical campaign was a "strange work" for Athanasius in that it was a task that was forced upon him, but from his own perspective his efforts in this arena were continuous with his ascetic and pastoral teaching. He would not see his own dogmatic discussions as abstractions that distract from Christian living but as correctives to hostile positions that would make

³²Hans von Campenhausen, *The Fathers of the Greek Church* (London: A. & C. Black, 1963), 70.

³³Erasmus, in a letter to John of Lincoln that is quoted in the Migne preface to Athanasius (PG 25:23), names τὸ δόκτεσιόν as Athanasius's outstanding gift. Athanasius, according to Erasmus, had none of Tertullian's harshness (*durum*), Jerome's showiness (*ἐντελευσιόν*), none of Hilary's laboriousness (*operosum*), Augustine's and Chrysostom's excessive rhetorical complexity (*laciniosum*), no *Isocraticos numeros* as in Gregory of Nazianzus.

Christian living impossible or at least unintelligible.³⁴ So while accepting Sieben's central thesis, this study ignores his warning against proceeding genre-by-genre through the writings of Athanasius.

In 1970 and 1971 Thomas Torrance published a four-part article titled "The Hermeneutics of St. Athanasius."³⁵ Torrance plucks texts from across the Athanasian corpus without distinguishing authentic, doubtful, and spurious works (fragments on Luke, the Psalms commentary, the *De incarnatione contra Apollinarium*). He also ignores important parts of the corpus: the *Life of Antony* is represented by a single reference at the end of a footnote, and other ascetic writings and the *Festal Letters* are not mentioned at all. Furthermore, Torrance—approaching Athanasius not as a historian of doctrine but as a practicing theologian—ignores much of Athanasian scholarship.³⁶ For these and other reasons his articles are not a reliable guide to the details of Athanasian biblical interpretation. Nevertheless, Torrance's theological interests produce a reading of Athanasius that is highly sympathetic. His emphasis on the theological coherence of Athanasius's thought keeps him from noticing development

³⁴Pelikan, refuting the charge that Athanasius "intellectualized faith into a species of knowledge," says: "When Athanasius set out to specify the content of the Christian message, his vocation as a defender of Nicene orthodoxy against the Arians compelled him to dwell upon the doctrinal and even propositional aspects of the message. But even in the midst of his vigorous polemics against Arianism or of his arguments in favor of the orthodox interpretation of the Scriptures, the existential character of the Christian message as a message of salvation continued to make its presence felt" (*Light of the World*, 90.)

³⁵Thomas F. Torrance, "The Hermeneutics of Saint Athanasius," parts 1–4, *Ekklēsiastikos Pharos* 52, no. 1 (1970): 446–68; 52, no. 2 (1970): 89–106; 52, no. 4 (1970): 237–49; 53 (1971): 133–49. The numbering of issues and pages is unconventional, and the typographical errors are legion. In the second part (i.e., 52, no. 2 [1970]: 89–106), a revised section was inserted in the wrong place and the unrevised text left standing. To repair this section, the reader must delete everything on p. 95 from the call to note 40a on the top line through the third line of the new paragraph, "are rooted in Jesus Christ,". (Included in the deletion are notes 40a–40h.) Replace this section with the material beginning on p. 93, line 11, with the call to note 27 and ending with p. 94, line 5, "are rooted in Jesus Christ,". —The error was evidently caused by a kind of *parablepsis* occasioned by the use of the phrase "human need" both on p. 93, line 11 and on p. 95, line 1. In the discussion that follows, I have corrected obvious typographical errors without notice.

³⁶Torrance mentions Harnack once (at the beginning) and refers occasionally to older writers whose comments may be found in notes to the English translations of Athanasius (Robertson, Newman, Shapland). His own construal of Athanasius's texts is flawed by numerous questionable exegeses.